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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000782

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD AND R/FO

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: NEW UAE MINISTER OF EDUCATION SETS OBJECTIVES

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) Summary: PAO's call on new UAE Minister of Education, Dr. Hanif Hassan, elicited teacher training and English language preparation as priorities of the ministry. In parallel development, the perceived need for "stricter controls of private schools" has prompted the Ministry of Education's seizure of a U.S. 6th grade social studies textbook for allegedly presenting Muslims in a negative light -- a story widely covered in local press. End summary.

2. (U) PAO paid a call on newly-appointed Minister of Education Dr. Hanif Hassan, vice president of the all-women's Zayed University, former International Visitor participant and close PA contact on February 26. Dr. Hanif talked about challenges of his new position and said that it is unfortunate the entire system of K-12 can't be scrapped since it is hard to change what has been in place over the last 30 years.

UAE PRIORITIES: TEACHER TRAINING AND ENGLISH

3. (U) Dr. Hanif's top two priorities are teacher training and English language preparation. He identified teacher training as the greatest challenge. Only 40% of Emirati nationals who work as teachers have college degrees. The plan is for Abu Dhabi emirate to build a training center and administer teacher training for the entire country. (Comment: Government schools are slowly replacing the foreign Arab teachers with Emiratis, but not enough young nationals are entering teaching careers. The shortage is particularly noticeable among the young male graduates who have many other career options; only men can teach in the all boys' schools. Foreign teachers come from other systems in the Arab world and tend to carry with them and to pass on to students their home country's world view, a situation the UAE would like to fix.)

4. (U) The second concern is English language training. English is the language of instruction at Zayed University and the Higher Colleges of Technology and the language of humanities and social science departments at the UAE University in Al-Ain. The national universities spend huge proportions of their budgets on remedial English over the first 1-2 years a student is at university due to the low level of English taught in the K-12 system. Only after students pass the English test can they start regular classes. For the first time this year, passing an English exam will be part of the college admission process. The Ministry also initiated teaching 1st and 4th grade math and science in English in order to introduce English language preparation in elementary schools.

TEXTBOOK SEIZURE OVER PRESENTATION OF ISLAM:  
CALL FOR MORE RIGOROUS MONITORING

5. (U) English daily Khaleej Times, February 27, published the front page story "Textbook of American school in capital seized over 'smell of racism'". According to the paper, over 100 copies of a social studies textbook "World Cultures" used in 6th grade of an "upscale American school in Abu Dhabi" were confiscated by the Ministry of Education February 26 for allegedly presenting Islam and the Muslim countries including Gulf states in a negative light while glorifying Israel.

6. (U) The paper quotes Assistant Under Secretary for Foreign Private Education Juma Salami accusing the book of promoting a hate culture: "While there are clamors for change in the Middle East, one has to understand that these are the books coming from the so-called 'free world'. This is a typical example of how textbooks are used to manipulate the thoughts of young minds.8 Minister of Education Dr. Hanif Hassan was quoted calling for a more rigorous monitoring system to keep an eye on the private schools and the "so-called embassy schools" in the country would be implemented.

7. (SBU) PAO spoke with Ron Ford, superintendent of the American International School (AIS) where the incident took place. AIS is a private for-profit K-12 school offering an American high school diploma. He said two women officials from the Ministry appeared unannounced at the school with

photocopies of pages from the book. The books were a resource in the four classrooms of the 6th grade, not used as part of the teaching syllabus. Approximately 64 copies of the book were seized and taken away. Ford said parents had complained about the book before when they found pictures of the Prophet Mohamed and these pages had been removed. Ford said that all new books used in the school were sent routinely to the Ministry for checking. Prior to this event the school never received any feedback or approval. The school checks the books but this one "slipped through".

18. (C) Ford said that he actually thought the Ministry had legitimate objections and that the book had been in use at AIS since 1998 and needed to be replaced.

#### RULES FOR FOREIGN SCHOOLS

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19. (U) PAO also talked with the superintendent of the American Community School (ACS), Dr. George Robinson, who said that six schools of the 90 private schools in Abu Dhabi were labeled as community schools (American, British, German, French, Pakistan and Japanese) and that the rules were different for these schools, which are all non-profits. He carefully reviews the texts used at ACS but doesn't send them to the Ministry for vetting.

10. (C) Discussing the Minister's comment about implementing a more rigorous monitoring system, Robinson said a wide range of quality exists among the private schools in Abu Dhabi, all of which are "for-profit" institutions, except for the six community schools. Many advertise themselves as "American style" even though they have no American content or teachers. The Ministry is asked to authenticate the diplomas from the schools but, with its small staff of inspectors, is unable to monitor quality. A/US Salami, quoted in the press, is his main contact at the ministry and Robinson said Salami is careful to try to distinguish between the schools which need closer attention and those which are better at self-regulating. Robinson tries to maintain an advising relationship with the Ministry in order to help vet circulars and new rulings before they are announced.

11. (C) Comment: Post has not yet discussed the issue of the textbook seizure with the UAEG, but the Ministry of Education clearly sees this decision to seize copies of a textbook perceived as presenting a negative picture of Islam and Muslims as part of its regulatory responsibility with regard to foreign schools.  
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